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it now and again. The cows being milked, the milk was set inside generally in wooden dishes, and afterwards made into butter and cheese. After the cows had remained sufficiently long at the first sheiling to make the pasture bare, they were moved on to the next, and the "yeild" or young cattle took their place on the first sheiling. And in this way they kept moving on from sheiling to sheiling till, by the time the corn crop had been secured, they had reached the point at which they started, having made a circuit of the whole moors.

But, in digging out this "Moorland Mound", had Mr. Laing made a thorough search of the whole place, I have no great doubt he might have found some real weapons, as almost all the "sheiling bothies" I know are built on, or alongside, an ancient cairn. The facility with which stones could be got, and smooth rich pasture that surrounded these cairns were the chief inducements that led to the selection of such spots for the erection of the sheiling bothies. Plenty of water was another inducement; and though I have never seen Mr. Laing's "Moorland Mound", if it is not built on a small bend of a "burn" or moorland stream, there is certainly a good well near it.

Many Caithness men are, I believe, prejudiced against Mr. Laing's book, for trying to attach to their progenitors the stigma of cannibalism. Now, I hope Mr. Laing will believe me, when I say that, so far as I am concerned, I am quite willing to assist Mr. Laing or any other gentleman who may wish to make further inquiry into the matter, and will do all in my power to prove that cannibalism existed as late as he pleases, if he only will produce the proofs. If it could be proved that our forefathers were cannibals, I am so far from thinking it any degradation, that I would feel proud to establish Mr. Laing's theories, as a proof of the progressive development of our countrymen who now, many of them, fill important situations in many parts of the world.

I may just add that a good deal of discussion has taken place here regarding the meaning of the term "Birkle Hills". "Birkle" is a term in every-day use here, and is a corruption of brittle, and may have reference to the brittle state of the half-burned stones that nearly cover these hills.

The PRESIDENT then resigned the chair to Dr. Charnock while he read the following paper :—

On the Keiss Graves. By JAMES HUNT, Ph.D., F.S.A., Pres.A.S.L.

As my name has been mentioned in connection with Mr. Laing's recent excavations in Caithness, I feel it advisable to lay before the Society a brief statement of the part I have taken in this matter.

On passing through Wick on my way to the Zetland Islands, I called on our Local Secretary, Mr. Joseph Anderson, who was engaged in making some explorations on behalf of the Society, and I was by him introduced to Mr. John Cleghorn, who wished to speak to me respecting what he believed to be Mr. Laing's erroneous conclusions. Mr. Cleghorn asserted that he could prove the human remains sent to

London to be those of shipwrecked mariners. I then assured Mr. Cleghorn, that if he would submit his views, with the facts on which they were based, to our Society, we should be ready to give him the same attention we had done to Mr. Laing, who so kindly introduced the subject to our notice.

I then proceeded on my journey, but the next mail brought me an intimation from Mr. Anderson, that there was a great wish amongst some of the people of Caithness that I should personally examine these so-called prehistoric remains on my return journey. I was further informed that these wishes had been made known to the proprietor of Keiss Castle, Major M'Cleay, and he had expressed his approval and given his consent. Much discussion and some amount of annoyance had however been caused by the promulgation of the theory respecting the cannibalism of the former inhabitants of Caithness; Major M'Cleay, therefore, expressed a hope that I should be able to carry out the object in view by merely opening one of the graves in the burial mound. I hesitated for some time before I accepted this proposal, feeling that the discovery of the Keiss graves belonged to Mr. Laing, I was unwilling to do anything which would appear at all disrespectful to that gentleman. On consideration, however, I felt that Mr. Laing, in his paper to us, had made out such a good case, that further investigations would only confirm his conclusions, and I consented to devote a day to an inspection of some of Mr. Laing's work.

After visiting the antiquities near Thurso, and especially those at Dunnet, I visited in company with Messrs. Anderson and Shearer a large number of cairns which had been opened in the interior of the county. I had the advantage of seeing others in the course of exploration, and others which still remain for examination. Having thus gained a general knowledge of the ordinary kind of antiquities in Caithness, I went, in company with Messrs. Anderson and Shearer, to examine the Keiss graves and other objects of interest described by Mr. Laing.

After a short inspection of the churchyard mound, I proceeded to what Mr. Laing has described as the burial mound, where, through the kindness of Mr. Mackenzie, the farm steward of the Keiss Castle estate, men were waiting ready to do any digging required.

Mr. Laing in his paper to us stated that the shape of this so-called burial mound "is so far obliterated that it is not easy to assign its precise breadth and height, and unless to an antiquarian eye, sharpened by the knowledge that kists had been found, the existence of a mound at all would escape notice." I can so far verify this statement as to affirm that I made inquiries for the "burial mound," and I heard with some amazement that I was standing on it. I inquired where the mound began at one end and terminated on the other, and I was told that there were clear traces of it for about half a mile. I was at once sceptical as to the artificial formation of this so-called burial mound, and said that I should have taken it for the remains of natural beach. My companions, however, were both positive as to the artificial character of the mound for at least three hundred yards,

and they said I could at once proceed to satisfy myself on this point. Mr. Laing informed us in his paper, that "kists were found in *every* instance with wonderful regularity at about fifteen feet apart in the central line of the mound." Mr. Anderson, on the authority of Mr. Sang (Major M'Cleay's late gardener), had also given his adhesion to this theory, and assured me that I could at once come on a kist if I allowed the men to dig at a distance of fifteen feet from either of the graves opened. Mr. Laing had computed this mound to contain from sixty to seventy graves on this theory, and as many as two hundred "if it extended, as there is reason to believe, for half a mile."

As only nine or ten of these skeletons had been dug up, I anticipated no difficulty in finding at least one to bring back for our Museum, I therefore measured off the distance, and the men set to work with the following result. On digging up the top layer of green turf there was a quantity of clean white sand about two feet in thickness; we then came to some beach pebbles, and I was told these were the stones covering a kist, and that all the others opened were just of this character. It still appeared to me that these stones had been deposited by natural agency nor could I detect any signs of artificial agency in their position. I was however rebuked for my doubts, and I was told that in a few minutes my scepticism should be removed. The stones were all thrown carefully out, and every precaution taken in removing them; but when this was done, we did not come to a kist, but to another layer of sand. Down the men dug through this sand, but still no kist. Occasionally our hopes revived on coming to another layer of stones, but only to be again disappointed. Having thus dug far below the position in which any of the so-called kists had been found, I decided that it would be advisable to cut a trench along the central line so that we might come on the kists. The fifteen feet apart theory, therefore, had thus proved to be erroneous—at least in one case, and further digging showed that it was erroneous in more. In cutting the trench I called my companions' attention to the fact that the layer of stones which they assured me was the covering of the kist continued all along the mound with wonderful regularity, and the section I thus laid open showed not the slightest trace of artificial formation, but ample indication of the action of water and wind in the rolled beds of beach stones and white sand. The trench after a time extended such a length that I ought to have met with at least two kists, but I found not a trace of any.

Greatly disappointed at such an unexpected result, I determined to at least examine the structure of some of the "kists" opened by Mr. Laing, and proceeded to open kist No. 1, out of which Mr. Laing had taken the skull, pelvis, and the greater part of the skeleton. It was from this kist the supposed female skull was taken of which Mr. Laing remarked in "No. 1, the low attributes of the type are carried to such an extent as to give it a decidedly Negro aspect, and make it in the opinion of some high scientific authorities who have examined it, the worst European skull they have ever seen with the exception of that of the Neanderthal."—*Journal A. S. L.*, v. 3, p. xxxiv.

I found the kist composed of beach stones resting on end in fine white sand and covered with other beach stones. There was no bottom to this kist or to any of the others opened. There is, however, nothing very peculiar about these cairns, for similar ones in nearly every respect are found in other parts of the coast of Scotland. On this subject there recently appeared an account of similar kists being found at Stonehaven in Kincardineshire. This account* says :—

“Now and again when any repair of the streets in Stonehaven has been made, ancient stone coffins have been found in different localities; principally, however, above the Cross, in the Old Town; and this week they have been got almost at the surface of the street. In one case the hair were adhering to the skull of the coffin’s occupant; in another the teeth were entire, and quite pure, and as white as chalk; the spine was quite whole, and the ribs adhering to it, and quite fresh. When these bodies had been buried the corpse must have been either cut or doubled up, for by the appearance of the bones they had belonged to tall individuals, and the coffins or cists, which were composed of slabs of slate of ten to fifteen inches long, set on edge, were only about four feet four inches in length; and, strange to say, there were no bottoms. Believing that the villagers of the fishing town of Cowie have a Danish origin, we can suppose that these are relics of some ancient Danes, and have lain in their quiet resting-place for at least 800 years.”

The contents of the kist however were more surprising to me than its formation, for to my surprise I took out the pelvis, femur, humerus, and vertebra now on the table. I inquired if this kist had been touched since Mr. Laing’s diggings, but was assured that it had not. Mr. Laing says in his paper, “I obtained the entire skeleton of No. 1.” How this confusion can have arisen it is not my province to decide.

Having thus sufficient evidence that nature had played a chief part in the formation of this burial mound, there still remained to be explained the existence, with these skeletons, of rude stone weapons. These weapons had been found not only by Mr. Laing but especially by Mr. Anderson. Immediately, therefore, on reaching London, I made, in company with Mr. Laing and our Curator a complete examination of all the weapons found in the burial mound. Mr. Laing very frankly admitted that in not one of these evidences was there any proof of human workmanship, and that he should never have taken them to be stone implements had he not found them with the skeletons. Mr. Laing has since well remarked,† “No drawings can give an adequate idea of their extreme rudeness;” and that “the stone weapons are all of the native sandstone or common beach stones of the district. They are for the most part rounded or fractured by nature, or by a single blow, with the least possible adaptation by rough chipping. The hammers or celts are almost all natural stones from the beach.”

Although Mr. Laing had “no hesitation in assigning the burial mound and kists to the early stone period,” I came to an entirely

* From “Aberdeen Free Press”.

† “Prehistoric Antiquities of Caithness”, p. 40.

different conclusion. The mere accidental fact that such stones were found with the skeletons I regard as of little consequence, considering that such stones as those exhibited by Mr. Laing from the burial mound are quite common on the beach.

But a more serious difficulty remains to be explained in the fact, that Mr. Anderson had sent us since much better formed implements taken from graves in the same mound. It has been incorrectly stated that these weapons have been given to the Museum of Scottish Antiquaries, and I take this opportunity of correcting this statement. I may also here observe, that an illustration of one of the implements attributed by Mr. Laing to the burial mound was really found in the shell mound. In plate I of Mr. Laing's work figures 4 and 5 are said to have come from kist No. 9, while, in reality, they came from a kist at the Birkle Hills; and a specimen from the shell mound, No. 5, is said to be one half the natural size, while, in reality, it is about one third. In plate II, figures 2, 3, 4 and 5 are all from this same kist 9, and the articles are now on the table.

Much now rests on the genuineness of these weapons, and after much inquiry I have arrived at the following important facts. Mr. Anderson did not see one of them found himself, but is dependant on Mr. Sang for his facts. He believes that Mr. Sang found them himself, and places implicit confidence in his veracity. Mr. Sang has, however, a few days ago informed me, that he did not find one of these now exhibited, and that the only one he did find—and gave to Mr. Anderson—was a lance or spear-head in the harbour mound. He says that all these weapons were given to him by the workmen employed, and that he had no reason to doubt their words as to the position in which they were found.

Having thus traced the finding of these implements to certain workmen, I have not thought it worth while to pursue these investigations any further. The implements can now be allowed to speak for themselves. This, too, completes my own account of this subject. Although I visited the Birkle Hills, shell mounds, and harbour mounds, I am unable to offer any opinion as to the nature of Mr. Laing's researches amongst these interesting relics. It is no doubt much to be regretted that Mr. Laing was unable to complete his investigation of these remains. I have purposely confined my remarks to what Mr. Laing considers to be the most important part of his investigation.

I will now only add, that although Mr. Laing's speculation as to the nature of the burial mound, and the stones found, is in my opinion wholly erroneous, yet we are under great obligation to that gentleman for exciting our interest in the prehistoric remains of Caithness. Although, therefore, we may be obliged to relinquish the fascinating theories he has promulgated in reference to the Caithness aborigines, we may yet have eventually to thank him for inducing other inquiries which may throw light on that most interesting subject.

On the motion of Dr. CHARNOCK thanks were given to the authors of the respective papers.

Dr. HUNT said that Mr. Laing had been invited to attend the

meeting of the Society on that occasion, and the following note had been received from him promising to be present, but he regretted that illness had prevented him from attending.

“6, Kensington Gardens Terrace, 22nd March.

“DEAR SIR.—I shall make a point of attending on the 3rd April, unless some unexpected engagement should intervene to make it impossible, which I do not anticipate. By that time I hope I shall have recovered my voice and be able to take a part in the discussion.

“Yours very faithfully,

“(Signed.) “S. LAING.”

Mr. C. CARTER BLAKE said they had had five papers read relating to the remains found in Caithness, some of which touched on the osteological characters of the remains that had been laid before the Society by Mr. Laing. Several conclusions were to be drawn from them, which depended, however, on the value of the facts announced by that gentleman. The skeletons found in the burial mound were said by those who had discussed the paper on a previous occasion, to be allied to those of various individuals of different races existing at the present day in Scotland, in Northern Africa, in Australia, and in that part of the globe inhabited by an Indo-European race. The facts as stated by Mr. Cleghorn, Mr. Anderson and others, are that the human remains found by Mr. Laing in Caithness, and supposed by him to indicate the existence in that part of Scotland of a prehistoric people, were those of cast-away sailors of various nations wrecked on that dangerous shore. These theories contrasted much. Mr. Blake ridiculed the notion that the skulls in the burial mound, especially that of the “ungainly female” from kist No. 1, indicated a peculiarly low type of humanity, or that the form of the pelvis exhibited was that of a Negro; and he considered the skull, numbered 1 in Mr. Laing’s book, and supposed to be a most degraded European skull, must go to the same limbo as the Neanderthal skull, with which it had been compared. He commented in the same tone on the discovery of a second pelvis in the kist No. 1, observing, that whether male or female, a second pelvis belonging to one skeleton was a remarkable fact, indicating a very peculiar formation in the prehistoric races. It had been said that Mr. Laing’s specimens had been too imperfectly preserved to be correctly described; but he denied that there had been any want of care in their preservation, and as to the pelvis on the table, it had been under his (Mr. Blake’s) charge since it was taken out of the grave by Dr. Hunt. There was better evidence that that pelvis was associated with the skulls and bones before shown to the Society by Mr. Laing, than in the case of the other bones, which were said to have been taken from No. 1, and were represented to mark a low and degraded form. He thought, indeed, there was not sufficient evidence that any of the bones that Mr. Laing had brought from Caithness were taken from the places from which they were said to have been derived. All the skeletons and skulls and pelves appear to have been mingled together in absurd disorder. Mr. Laing did not himself seem to know to what they belonged and where they came from,

and there were no accurate facts before the Society on those points. He regretted that Mr. Laing was not present to give some explanation respecting the inconsistencies and anomalies that had been noticed in his book, so as to reconcile them with the facts had been stated. With respect to the implements ; when Mr. Laing was asked about those from the burial mound, certain chipped flints and round boulders were pointed out by him as those found in the chief's kist, and he thought that the fact of their being found with a skeleton was evidence that they were implements and weapons. As to that kist the accounts of it from various sources had greatly differed since the day that the remains said to have been taken from it were exhibited by Mr. Laing.

Mr. HIGGINS pointed out several inconsistencies in Mr. Laing's book with the statements he had made at other times. In page 9, for example, Mr. Laing said that he was personally responsible for the actual discovery of every relic and for the description of the positions in which they were found. It seemed, however, very doubtful whether he actually saw *in situ* those said to have come from the burial mound. What Mr. Laing had said to Dr. Hunt respecting the character of the supposed implements found in the kist was contrary to the statement in page 8 of his book, that several other stones had been found in the kist, but that he had rejected everything that had not decidedly been made by man. With regard to the second pelvis found in the kist No. 1, he did not think the finding of a second one there so very extraordinary, for kists were sometimes opened that had two skeletons inside, and that might have been the case with the kist in question. The pelvis on the table was in Mr. Higgins's opinion that of a female ; the long bones which had been found by Dr. Hunt with the pelvis confirmed that view, and it was very remarkable that out of the human remains found in seven of the kists, five of them should have been those of females. The account given by Mr. Laing of the places where the bones came from he considered very vague and unsatisfactory.

Dr. CHARNOCK said the name Birkle was probably derived from *byrgen*, *byrgels*, a burial-place ; a word found in several places in the Anglo-Saxon versions of the Gospels and Pentateuch ; etymologically connected with *beorh*, a hill, heap of stones, place of burial, a *barrow*, and *birgan*, to bury.

Dr. HUNT pointed out some further incongruities in Mr. Laing's book. In page 40 it was stated that the stone implements were "for the most part rounded, or fractured by nature or by a single blow ;" but he (Dr. Hunt) defied any one to say whether a stone that had been fractured by a single blow had been so broken by nature or by art. With respect to the discovery of the second pelvis found in kist No. 1, which there could be no doubt was the same kist indicated by Mr. Laing, he repeated that he found the pelvis on simply examining the kist, and came upon it with the greatest surprise. Mr. Blake was not correct in saying that Mr. Anderson, Mr. Shearer, and Mr. Cleghorn had stated that all the skeletons in the burial mound were those of shipwrecked mariners ; but they agreed in considering

the mound to be a naturally-formed hill, and that it afforded no evidence of the antiquity of man. With regard to the implements, little confidence could be placed in them, as it seemed to be not really known where and by whom they were found. It was said that a more perfectly formed implement associated with a skull found on the burial mound was in the possession of Professor Ogston of Aberdeen, and he had been written to requesting him to exhibit them to the Society, but he had not done so, therefore that evidence could not be relied on. Dr. Hunt observed, that though Mr. Laing's book had been rather severely handled, it must be satisfactory to him that Professor Owen had spoken of his researches in Caithness as the type of archæological investigations. Thus the whole of Mr. Laing's discoveries and his description of them, promised to become a part of the scientific literature of the country, and it was the duty of that Society to submit them to a searching examination, and to correct any erroneous conclusions that might be drawn from Mr. Laing's book. He regretted that Mr. Laing had not been present to reply to the objections that had been brought forward. He could only say, that in the remarks he had made, he had not been actuated by a party spirit, nor did he entertain any repugnance to the idea that the ancestors of the Northern Britons had been cannibals. He felt it impossible, however, to accept Mr. Laing's facts, and he hoped the Duke of Portland would kindly give permission to that Society to complete the excavations in Caithness, that this subject would be followed up, and that the subject would be brought before the Society on some future occasion.

Mr. C. CARTER BLAKE, in reference to the opinion expressed by Mr. Higgins, that most of the skeletons were those of females, objected to the foundation of such an opinion on the length of the bones or the shape of the pelvis now on the table.

Mr. HIGGINS said he had carefully measured the pelvis, and that he thought the measurements as well as the general appearance of the bones warranted the assumption that they were those of a female.

The meeting then adjourned.

APRIL 17TH, 1866.

JAMES HUNT, ESQ., PH.D., F.S.A., F.R.S.L., PRESIDENT, IN THE CHAIR.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed.

The names of the following gentlemen, elected Fellows of the Society since the last meeting, were announced:—W. C. Bonnerjee, Esq., F.G.S., 108, Denbigh Street, Belgravia; S. J. Da Costa, Esq., 7, Orsett Place, Westbourne Terrace, W.; Hon. S. Davenport, Adelaide, New South Wales; John Moore, Esq., Adelaide, New South Wales; Robert Peel, Esq., Adelaide, New South Wales; John Towers, Esq., Berkeley Villas, Loughborough Park; H. Victor Martin, Esq., M.R.C.S., Billington House, Surrey; T. A. Wise, Esq., M.D., Rostellan Castle, Cork, Ireland; James Champley, Esq., M.D., 8,